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PRESS RELEASE

Baker-Polito Administration Announces Creation of Norcross Hill Wildlife Management Area

**Wildlife Management Area in Templeton Will Protect 465 Acres of Wildlife
Habitat**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Department of Fish and Game

Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

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TEMPLETON — The Baker-Polito Administration today announced that the Department of Fish and Game’s Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) has acquired 465 acres of land in Templeton to create the Norcross Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Purchased from the Walter E. Fernald Corporation for \$1.4 million, the acquisition connects with other protected land parcels to establish an area of more than 2,650 acres of protected open space in the north Worcester County region, increasing resiliency to climate change, protecting valuable wildlife habitat, and improving outdoor recreation opportunities.

“Land conservation not only improves the environment and quality of life throughout Massachusetts, it is also an important part of the strategy to address climate change,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “The Norcross Hill Wildlife Management Area will benefit native wildlife while providing new recreational opportunities for sportsmen and women, birders, naturalists and hikers.”

“Our administration is proud to have been able to work with local and private partners to protect this beautiful and ecologically valuable area and to connect it with 2,200 adjacent acres of protected open space,” **said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito**. “We continue to be committed to conserving our natural resources and ensuring all citizens of the Commonwealth have access to the recreation that our rivers, lakes, oceans, forests and parks have to offer.”

The 465-acre Norcross Hill WMA is connected to more than 2,200 acres of open space, including the Department of Conservation and Recreation’s (DCR) Otter River and

Templeton State Forests, Templeton Development Center land, municipal open space, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers holdings, and land owned by area land trusts.

“The many benefits of this conservation project include reducing the impacts of climate change on wildlife and forests,” **said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides**. “Land conservation and management improves carbon storage in forests and soil, while creating and conserving connections between large conserved areas help species travel between these areas and find habitats that best fit the changing climate.”

“Land conservation depends on partnerships with conservation organizations, land trusts, sportsmen, and conservation-minded landowners, and financial support from these groups and government agencies,” **said DFG Commissioner Ron Amidon**. “I want to thank the Fernald Corporation, the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, the North County Land Trust, Joanne and Danny Burdin, the Fields Pond Foundation, the Town of Templeton, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and the Department of Conservation and Recreation for working with us on this multi-phased conservation project.”

“MassWildlife plans to continue the tradition of active management on the forests and fields of Norcross Hill with a goal of addressing wildlife with special conservation needs,” **said Dr. Mark Tisa, Director of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife**. “This fall, with MassWildlife oversight, the Fernald Corporation will be conducting a timber forestry operation utilizing best practices that address sensitive ecological and historic sites. An important conservation outcome will be the creation of an uncommon habitat, young forest. This habitat will provide the necessary elements needed for less common birds such as American woodcock, ruffed grouse, prairie warbler and the endangered whip-poor-will.”

The Norcross Hill WMA was purchased with \$700,000 from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs’ [Landscape Partnership Grant Program](/service-details/landscape-partnership-grant-program), [\(/service-details/landscape-partnership-grant-program\)](/service-details/landscape-partnership-grant-program) \$395,000 from the state’s open space bond, and \$305,000 from the [MassWildlife Wildlands Fund](/service-details/wildlands-fund) [\(/service-details/wildlands-fund\)](/service-details/wildlands-fund), which is funded from a \$5 Wildlands Conservation Stamp purchased by sportsmen and women who buy Massachusetts fishing, hunting, or trapping licenses.

In the spring of 2020, the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust and the North County Land Trust, with funding from the Fields Pond Foundation, will acquire a Conservation Restriction (CR) on 17 acres of land owned by Joanne and Danny Burdin. DCR is committed to purchase another 27 acres of municipal land from the Town of Templeton, adding to the Otter River and Templeton State Forests. These acquisitions and the role of the partners was necessary for DFG to qualify for the landscape partnership grant.

The Norcross Hill property consists of several hundred acres of forested woodlands, 40 acres of wetlands, and 80 acres of scenic, working agricultural fields. The habitat mix supports a variety of rare and common wildlife. Bear, deer and turkey are commonly found in the area, while American bitterns and eastern whip-poor-wills—both birds protected by the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act—have been observed in the area. The meadows, a less common habitat in the state, are also important for the breeding bobolinks, meadowlarks and other grassland-dependent wildlife. Nearly a mile of stream frontage is protected along Norcross Hill Brook and Beaver Brook, which are Coldwater Fisheries Resource habitats.

Protection of the Norcross Hill WMA enhances numerous outdoor recreational opportunities. Previously closed to hunting, the property provides new access and hunting opportunities for sportsmen and women. White-tailed deer, black bear, waterfowl, and turkey can be found in the woods and fields. Due to their small size within the WMA property, the two brooks provide very limited fishing opportunities, but their protection is important to brown and rainbow trout stocked by MassWildlife further downstream. Birders will appreciate the grassland bird viewing opportunities, including hearing whip-poor-wills at dusk and dawn or watching bobolinks, swallows, and other grassland loving birds.

The funds from the sale of the Norcross Hill property went to the Walter E. Fernald Corporation, established in 1848 as the first public institution in America for people with developmental disabilities. Beginning in the 1920s, the Norcross Hill property supported the intellectually disabled residents of the Templeton and Fernald Developmental Centers. The sale will provide resources for the corporation to continue its mission of advocating for the intellectually disabled.

“We are fortunate to have these beautiful areas of open space for all to enjoy,” **said State Senator Anne Gobi, Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture.** “The Legislature continues to make it a priority to provide funding and to work with our partners in government and the private sector for preservation and conservation.”

“I’m very grateful to the Department of Fish and Game for their continued efforts to protect open space in the region,” **said State Representative Susannah Whipps (I-Athol).** “The Norcross Hill Wildlife Management Area adds to the growing list of outdoor attractions this region has to offer.”

“Mount Grace Land Trust is very excited about this project, particularly since it’s our first project in the town of Templeton. I also want to express appreciation to Jo-Anne and Danny Burdin as part of this conservation effort. As a member of the local Open Space Committee, Jo-Anne Burdin played an early and critical role in helping the team reach the 500-acre minimum, then when another landowner was unable to proceed, she and Danny decided to protect their own backyard,” **said Leigh Youngblood, Executive Director of the Mount Grace Land Trust.** “This was a true community project, and we are very excited to have helped enable the long-awaited final chapter of permanently protecting the Fernald School.”

“North County Land Trust is so pleased to be working with our partners to keep this property open to the public,” **said Anna Wilkins, Executive Director of the North County Land Trust.** “Norcross Hill has it all: priority habitat, outdoor recreation, agriculture, water resources, connectivity and it’s just plain beautiful. It’s great to know this land will be available for future generations.”

“In many ways, the Intellectually Disabled and open space are kindred spirits: vulnerable, slow to be appreciated and all too often exploited,” **said Thomas Frain, President of the Walter E. Fernald Corporation.** “The sale of this property will not only preserve this beautiful land in perpetuity, but will provide sorely needed resources for the corporation to continue its mission of almost 171 years – advocating for the Intellectually Disabled.”

“The Town was pleased to participate in this locally and regionally important project which results in the permanent protection of one of the most culturally and historically

significant open spaces in our community,” **said Templeton Town Manager Carter Terenzini**. “The sale of the two Town parcels to the Commonwealth will enhance the Otter River and Templeton State Forests and further improve the Town's financial picture.”

DFG and MassWildlife jointly administer the agency’s [land protection program](/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/wildlife-habitat-conservation/land-acquisition-and-protection.html) (</eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/wildlife-habitat-conservation/land-acquisition-and-protection.html>). In fiscal year 2019, the agency completed 41 land acquisition projects, utilizing \$6.2 million and protecting 2,436 acres of wildlife habitat.

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Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

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Department of Fish and Game (</orgs/department-of-fish-and-game>)

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MASSWILDLIFE

Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (</orgs/division-of-fisheries-and-wildlife>)

MassWildlife is responsible for the conservation of freshwater fish and wildlife in the Commonwealth, including endangered plants and animals. MassWildlife restores, protects, and manages land for wildlife to thrive and for people to enjoy.

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